

Locked in Science Building— “It Was a Rotten Birthday!”

A News Commentary
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Have you ever been forced to confront one of your fears? Well, Lutte Erwin, an energetic sixty-something art major at Methodist College recently had to face her fear of the dark. On October 9th, Lutte found herself locked in the Science Building at night!!! Her first experience in the photography darkroom turned out to be a disaster. She entered the darkroom at 3 p.m. to develop film for a class she was taking. Engaged in her work and unaware of the time that had elapsed, Lutte emerged from the darkroom to discover that the building was deserted, dimly lit and LOCKED. She did not know that campus Police and Public Safety routinely locked the building around 7 p.m. every evening. Her fear intensified as she tried to open door after door meeting the same result - there was NO way out of this building! Lutte walked up the dark staircase in search of a phone. Her plan at this point was to call 911. The dispatcher contacted Methodist College Police and Public Safety and officers immediately responded to the call. A security guard unlocked the door for Lutte and made sure that she was all right. Laughing about the situation with the security guard, Lutte displayed immense strength of character. Not everyone could confront one of their biggest fears with such aplomb like this unassuming, charming lady.

Lutte shared some of her thoughts on

the ordeal with us. “It was scary. I thought I might have to spend the night there on the couch. I would rather sleep under the couch. You have to be cautious. I’m just glad I didn’t have a heart attack. It was an experience I would never want to repeat.”

Lutte vehemently emphasized that she blamed no one for this incident. It was an unfortunate incident that unfortunately coincided with her birthday.

When researching the incident, we discovered that a similar incident occurred a couple of years ago—same building, same darkroom. Why did it happen again and why weren’t appropriate measures taken to ensure the safety of the students? Two safeguards which should have been in place to prevent this situation from reoccurring were missing. The red light bulb outside the darkroom that would normally alert security that the room was in use is apparently a very popular commodity! These light bulbs are routinely pilfered. Tom Daughtry, Assistant Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds has stated that a fixture will now be installed to cage the bulb which should prevent it from disappearing. The absence of panic bars on the doors in some of the buildings at Methodist is a necessary safeguard that must not be ignored. According to Dave Reece, Director of Police and Public Safety, a requisition has been submitted to install panic bars in the lower levels of the Science Building and Trustees’ Building. Our question: Why aren’t the top floors under consideration as well? Safety considerations should be addressed comprehensively, not piece by piece to meet minimal requirements.



No exit.

Campus Security Legislation Signed into Law

WASHINGTON (U-Wire)—On Oct. 7, President Clinton signed into law a higher education bill containing extensive campus security related provisions. The new law will expand disclosure of campus crime statistics and require schools to keep a public police log. Also, schools will no longer be able to hide violent criminal behavior in secret campus courts. Other provisions will suspend aid to students convicted of drug crimes, and create programs to address binge drinking and violence against women on campus.

The requirements, part of a five year reauthorization of federal higher education laws, will apply to all schools, both public and private, that participate in federal student aid programs.

These reforms come after years of charges that colleges were exploiting loopholes in reporting laws to underreport campus crimes and protect their images. The members of Security On Campus, Inc. (<http://www.soconline.org>), a national non-profit watchdog organization, joined with other victims’ rights groups, media organizations led by the Society of Professional Journalists (<http://spi.org>), and law enforcement groups to demand that Congress make schools be honest and open about their campus crime.

“These changes will significantly improve campus safety across the country,” said S. Daniel Carter the Vice President of SOC. “Students have been deliberately left in the dark and couldn’t make informed decisions about how to avoid and prevent campus crime.”

“Also left in the dark are the Boards of Trustees and certain administrators. This public information available to trustees, alumni, faculty, and parents will force administrators to provide adequate assets to reduce all types of crime, especially student-on-student crime,” added Carter.

The amendments mark the first major revisions of a reporting law enacted in 1990 to address increasing violence on college campuses. Howard and Connie Clery, SOC’s cofounders, led the effort to pass that law after their daughter Jeanne was murdered at Lehigh University in 1986. The new law is named in memory of Jeanne Clery.

Connie Clery said the new law is “a living memorial to our beautiful daughter and the thousands of other victims of campus crime. This will save many lives.”

Nearly 50,000 crimes are reported on college campuses annually according to the understated U.S. Department of Education statistics.

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